



United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

# Wetlands Conservation

Wetlands are dynamic ecosystems that bring us clean water, replenish our water supplies and protect us from the dangers of floods and storms. They strengthen our nation's economy by carrying and cleaning water that's needed to produce the food, fiber and goods and services that people around the world demand and enjoy. Wetlands provide regular harvests of grains, vegetables, hay and cranberries, timber and medicines that are critical to the economy and provide retreats for relaxation and recreation.

Nearly one-third of all species of birds and 190 species of amphibians rely on wetlands for survival. Our nation's wetlands support nearly 5,000 plant species. In fact, more than one-third of threatened and endangered species live only in wetlands, and nearly half use wetlands at some point in their lives.

Wetlands are a precious resource that can be found in every state, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) works to preserve them for the benefit of future generations. NRCS cultivates cooperative conservation relationships with federal agencies, state and local governments, communities, tribes, non-profit organizations and private landowners to create, improve, and protect these precious and necessary natural resources.



NRCS and its partners are working nationwide planning and implementing wetlands projects. All plans are done on site, and designed to do what is necessary for a specific, individual wetland. When the product of a plan is put into service, you can be sure it's cost effective, based on sound science, and implemented according to strict standards.

Between 1997 and 2003, agricultural producers across the nation achieved an average net gain of 44,000 acres of wetlands each year. Producers who participate in USDA programs have proven themselves good stewards of the land, and NRCS local offices are working closely with them to improve our nation's wetlands. (See chart).

| Net Wetlands Change Due to Agriculture, 1997 – 2003 |             |                  |                           |
|---|-------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Time  | Period      | Total Net Change | Annual Average Net Change |
|   | 1997 - 2001 | +132,000 Acres   | +33,000 Acres/Year        |
|   | 2001 - 2003 | +131,000 Acres   | +66,000 Acres/Year        |

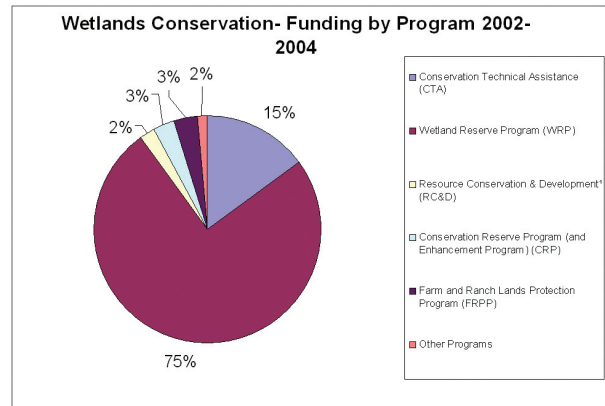


Since April of 2004, cooperative conservation has restored, protected, or improved nearly 832,000 acres of wetlands and more progress is ahead. NRCS expects an additional 1.6 million acres to be restored, created, improved, or protected by the end of fiscal year 2006.

*Helping People Help the Land*

NRCS voluntary programs that provide technical and/or financial assistance to improve wetlands include:

- **Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)**  
Program – This program provides direct cooperative conservation planning, design, and implementation assistance, that helps people conserve, maintain, and improve their natural resources.
- **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)** – This program assists landowners with restoring and protecting wetlands through cooperative conservation easements and cost-share agreements.
- **Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D)**  
– This program helps people protect and develop their economic, natural, and social resources under the guidance of a locally elected council. A RC&D council, with public involvement, identifies community natural resource concerns and needs. NRCS works with the council and landowners to develop and implement cooperative conservation plans that meet their needs.
- **Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)** – This program provides matching funds to keep productive farm and rangeland in agricultural uses by limiting conversion to nonagricultural uses of land.
- **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)** – This program is for people who want to develop and improve fish and wildlife habitat primarily on private land.
- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** – This program helps eligible participants install or implement structural and management practices on their land.
- **Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)** – This program helps landowners restore and protect grassland, rangeland, pastureland, shrubland and other land, and provides assistance for grasslands rehabilitation activities.



- **Plant Materials Program (PMP)** – This program selects conservation plants and develops innovative planting technology to solve the nation's most important resource concerns.

Through these programs, NRCS is able to help landowners install conservation practices that enhance wetlands. From 2002 through 2004, NRCS provided over \$7.1 million in direct financial and technical assistance to landowners to establish wetlands management practices on their land. (See graph).

NRCS has been successful at improving and protecting wetlands throughout the U.S. Since 1992, over 1 million wetland and associated upland acres have been enrolled in WRP. Through EQIP, an additional 27,769 acres of wetlands have been restored and another 106,667 acres have been enhanced or improved since the program was established in 1996.

Whether you're a private landowner, a representative of a tribe, or the head of a conservation group, NRCS staff will work with you to develop a wetland conservation plan. Anyone interested in more information about NRCS programs and wetlands conservation should contact their local USDA Service Center or NRCS office. Information also is available on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.  
August 2005